

The Forty-Niner's Centennial

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freedom, Thomas Jefferson's draft of the Declaration of Independence, Washington's copy of the constitution, the Bill of Rights, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, and his Gettysburg Address, a thirteenth century manuscript of the Magna Carta, the first printed letter by Columbus on the discovery of America, down to the charter of the United Nations.

"Freedom's holy flame" was lighted upon the altars of newly liberated nations, and rekindled upon others. The privilege afforded to view these historic papers called upon our people and our fellowmen everywhere to reaffirm and dedicate anew the intellectual, moral and spiritual sources of the freedom we enjoy, through which we have obtained our great and cherished institutions.

The train equipment was capable of admitting 10,000 visitors each day, and as evidence of appreciation by the public there were nearly always those waiting who could not gain admittance. As an educational project, designed to reach not only school children and college students but adults as well, there has been nothing like it in our history. The documents marking man's first struggle for personal liberty were viewed with awe and veneration at every stopping place across the nation. The film strip "The Birth of Our Freedom" was inspiring, challenging the patriotism of all.

THE FORTY-NINER'S CENTENNIAL

It was August 19, 1848, when a letter written from San Francisco in April previous, was published in the *New York Herald*, containing the first information had in the east about the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill, California. But little attention was paid to this, and not until December 5, that year, when President Polk confirmed the news, did the country begin to burn with excitement. By New Years day, 1849, twenty-six days later, 6,000 miners were reported digging gold in California.

The "forty-niners" went by boat, crossing Panama by foot, and by the Santa Fe trail through the southwest desert lands, all risking hunger and death; but the great bulk of the gold rush was by the Oregon trail in covered wagons, the longest trail in history. They depended for guidance entirely upon the letters of those who had gone before and arrived, or upon the reports by word of those who had come back.

In April, 1849, 20,000 persons were camped along the Missouri river. With the earliest signs of spring, wagons began moving toward Independence, Missouri, the jumping-off place from the boats. The rush over the plains, with sometimes whole families, began in May. The first "forty-niners" made little preparation for the trip across the mountains to the Pacific coast, as all fared well until they passed beyond the Platte valley in Nebraska. Soon stories began to come from over the Rocky mountains of starvation, of plagues, especially cholera, of broken wagons and other disasters. Letters from those arriving in California, or by word of mouth reports from those returning, told of harrowing experiences.

The 110 day journey from the Missouri river to the Pacific ocean demanded careful planning with food supplies of first importance. Contrasting the time required for this journey one hundred years ago, a citizen of Maryville, Missouri, traveled by auto recently from South Gate, California, a distance of about 2,000 miles, in forty hours, his wife taking her turn at the wheel.—Lillian Keegan Farrar, in the *Axtell Standard*, Kansas, July 8, 1948.

Dr. Howard K. Beale of the department of History of the University of North Carolina has resigned, effective September 1, 1948, and is coming west to occupy a position as professor of history at the University of Wisconsin. Dr. Beale has made several visits to Iowa in research work at the State University of Iowa and at the State Department of History and Archives at Des Moines.

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